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THE STUDY OF GRAMMAR IN SECOND-YEAR SPANISH

By HAYWARD KENISTON

THE study of Spanish in our secondary-schools has passed through the initial stage of a subject of transitory interest; it has been accepted as a regular modern language in the curriculum, on a par with the other modern languages. It is the business of teachers of Spanish to give to it the qualities of systematic discipline which were once counted as the chief virtues of the study of Latin and Greek and which have been made in so large a measure a part of the training in French and German.

The study of grammar, the development of a sound teaching technique in the presentation of grammatical material is unquestionably the phase of modern language teaching which can most easily be developed to a high point of excellence by the average teacher, for it does not require any special gift of tongues nor a residence in foreign lands; its chief requirements are intelligence and accuracy. And for that matter, it is also the phase of modern language teaching which is most likely to prove of permanent value to the student. For the great majority of our students of modern languages will never have occasion to use these languages either for vocational or cultural purposes. We shall have made slight contribution to the real development of our students if our modern language instruction has not helped them to think clearly and logically.

It will be objected perhaps that these are qualities which can far better be taught in other subjects, such as mathematics. Undoubtedly this is the chief virtue of the study of mathematics. But for that matter, it is the fundamental purpose of all education. Lip-training, ear-training, hand-training are all important elements in education, but in the end they are secondary to the prime business of mind-training. Salamanders and chameleons can be taught by experience to act in a given fashion; they cannot be taught to think. As teachers of Spanish we must contribute our part to that training in thought which, through divers means,

forms the fundamental unity of the education of our boys and girls.

The natural tendency in the study of modern languages is unfortunately to consider that the first cursory survey of the grammar is sufficient for the needs of the student and to pass directly to the easier processes of *translation*. The average student, and not infrequently the teacher as well, on the conclusion of the "First Book" heaves a sigh of relief and thinks, "Well, that's over!" And it must be admitted that our present text-books in Spanish encourage that feeling. Not because they are poor or unsound or dull, but because they for the most part offer no material for the further study of grammar.

That is the first condition in the study in Spanish to be remedied. We have already a number of excellent books for the beginner in Spanish. But these books make no pretense of presenting either a complete or a systematic survey of Spanish grammar. Some of them do not even contain the subjunctive at all! To supplement these "First Books" in Spanish, we must have "Second Books" and "Third Books" which will review the principles already presented and extend the knowledge of syntax. We must make strict grammatical training an essential part, not only of the first year, but of three years of work in our secondary schools.

Until such books are available, what can the teacher of Spanish do to fill the need? A number of the Spanish grammars now available contain sufficient material for two years of high-school work. They are of two types: (1) those presenting the material in a single group, including as they progress a large amount of secondary and exceptional information; (2) those presenting the material in two groups, the first containing only the essentials and fundamentals, the second providing for a more systematic review of the whole field. Of the two types, the second is greatly to be preferred. In the first place it enables the student to concentrate his attention upon the regular, normal usages, freeing him from the distraction of infinite exceptions. In the second place it permits a rapidity of progress in simple expression and in reading which encourages both class and teacher by giving them the conscious satisfaction of achievement. Finally it provides even those who study the language but a single year with a unified survey of the whole field.

The chief objections to the grammars of this latter type now in use are that the second part of the work is either too brief or too extended for the best results and that the materials of this second part seem rather a new work than an enlargement of the first part.

For the teacher who has used one of the incomplete "First Books" in the first year of Spanish, there seems to be no other recourse in the second year than the adoption of one of the fuller grammars. In this case the type of the "First Book" must determine the choice of the grammar. If the "First Book" be one which does not attempt to make even a cursory survey of the whole field, then the grammar which follows it must be one of the first type, which takes up the material relatively *in extenso* as it progresses and the teacher may begin at that point which begins the material not included in the "First Book." If the "First Book" be one which gives a hasty survey of the whole field, then the grammar may well be of the second type, offering a systematic review. In either case the situation is unfortunate, for the vocabulary of the new book is certain to be different from that of the first-year book and the full benefits of repetition and drill on the same material are lost.

It must be observed that a number of the elementary composition books contain a "grammar review" and that there is a certain temptation for the teacher to accept this as a substitute for the formal continuation of grammar study. The inadequacy of this method is clear to all those who have attempted it. For a "grammar review" can plainly be attained only through the instrumentality of a grammar. This means that the teacher must provide the class with a new and unfamiliar book, for the review of a "First Book" would obviously not extend the knowledge of the class.

Here arises the first difficulty. What shall the reference grammar be? There can be no doubt of the excellence of Ramsey's *Text-book of Modern Spanish*; it is as sound and as thorough as that excellent work on which it is based: the Bello-Cuervo *Gramática castellana*. But it is in no sense a practical grammar to place in the hands of a second-year high-school student. Teachers who have tried to use it even in advanced college classes know from experience that the student derives little profit from reading its complex distinctions; the mere statement of a grammar rule, without some actual practice in the exemplification of the rule in

living sentences which he himself must use, makes little impression upon him. It is not dabbling here and there that teaches a child to think but systematic study of a definite whole and that whole must be limited to his capacity for absorption.

And there is an even greater practical difficulty: classes do not take seriously references to grammars; perhaps the notes in texts of Cæsar and Virgil are responsible for their skepticism. In fact, it is to be questioned whether the benefit which they derive from such reference can be compared with that obtained from the study and imitation of the actual expressions found in the Spanish text of the composition book. In general it is safe to say that the use of a composition book would better be deferred to the third year of work, when the "grammar review" is really a review of material already studied.

There remains one other phase of grammar work in the second year: that is the use of the reader or text to illustrate the grammatical points already studied. A student acquires a greatly enhanced respect for the rule that the preterite perfect is used instead of the pluperfect in temporal clauses, when he finds that it is actually used by people who write Spanish and is not a mere devilish device for tormenting him.

The teacher must bear in mind that this phase of the work is merely a supplement to formal work in grammar and not a substitute for it. The points which arise are unrelated and offer no consistent development. It is difficult to secure proper preparation by the class or to review them the following hour. And there is the added danger that too much time may be devoted to this part of the reading and that the student's attention, absorbed in routine parsing of the text, will be turned away from the content of the passage.

The chief point is that our students must be encouraged to think that grammar is, after all, not a theory of expression but an interpretation of expression. And this means that the teacher must be eternally vigilant in emphasizing in the reading of the class those sentences which illustrate the grammar he is studying. This emphasis will naturally best be achieved by leading the student to make the observation. We must not be content with the

questions "What?" and "How?"; the question most often on our lips should be "Why?". But that is only repeating the thought with which this paper began: that our chief function is to teach our students to think.

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